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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
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RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0893  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2892  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2277  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE  
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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN AND SCA/PPD

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SUBJECT: Kyrgyz Women Debate Merits of Legalized Prostitution

BISHKEK 00000392 001.2 OF 002

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11. (U) SUMMARY: The Women's Political Discussion Club, which wields increasing influence in Kyrgyz politics, held a heated discussion on prostitution in Kyrgyzstan and plans to raise the issue in Parliament. Widely reported as an effort to "legalize" prostitution, it is, in fact, an effort to raise awareness of prostitution and possibly regulate the industry, which is not illegal in Kyrgyzstan. The Club's efforts are noteworthy as the first widespread attempt to address a problem which is pervasive but largely ignored by mainstream Kyrgyz society. END SUMMARY.

PROSTITUTION: WIDESPREAD BUT UNADDRESSED IN KYRGYZSTAN  
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12. (U) Prostitution in Kyrgyzstan is not illegal, but there are three statutes which indirectly regulate prostitution. The statutes forbid recruiting women into prostitution, corrupting minors, and opening a brothel. The statutes are largely ineffective because the laws are seldom enforced and the fines are small. Prostitution is widespread in Kyrgyzstan, with thinly-disguised brothels, called "saunas," on nearly every city block. The classified ads in Kyrgyzstan's largest newspaper contain advertisements for over forty saunas, with names like "Romance," "Incognito," and "Mirage." Besides saunas, there are dozens of classified ads for so-called "relaxation" or "relaxing massage," which is prostitution in local parlance.

DIVERSE GROUP DISCUSSES PROBLEM OF PROSTITUTION  
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13. (U) The Discussion Club meeting was attended by approximately 100 representatives - male and female - of political parties, NGO's, mass media, sex workers, and the clergy. The primary topic of discussion was police corruption and complicity in prostitution. Sex workers complained that the standard bribe that police demand from them has increased from 50 soms (\$1.38) to 300 soms (\$8.33)

over the last year. Police demand bribes often and arbitrarily, posing a threat to the sex workers' livelihoods. Police often demand "subotniki," or free Saturdays at the saunas. NGO representatives recalled a case when a pregnant sex worker was forced to provide free sexual services to a large group of students from the police academy. A representative from Center for Police Reform vowed that he would investigate the incident if the victim files a formal complaint. The most emotionally charged discussion centered on the role of religion in addressing societal ills and helping victims of prostitution. The discussion leader expressed disappointment that the Mufti and the head of the Russian Orthodox Diocese turned down invitations to attend. However, a representative of the Church of Jesus Christ said that AIDS was a punishment from God for the sin of prostitution and that the sin would be punished for ten generations. The representative of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community expressed a more tolerant view and his willingness to help ex-prostitutes rebuild their lives.

¶4. (U) One outcome of the meeting is that a leader of the Social Democratic Party and member of Parliament, Bakyt Beshimov, vowed to raise the issue in Parliament. Galina Kulikova, a deputy from the majority party, Ak Zhol, said that legalization would benefit sex workers by establishing a safe work place, trade unions, and regular medical care. Somewhat inconsistently, she noted that legalized prostitution should include "tougher penalties for men who go to prostitutes." It would appear Kulikova was referring to the so-called "Swedish model," in which it is legal to sell sex but not to buy sex.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: The Women's Political Discussion Club, which was established in 2006 with support of the National Democratic Institute and is supported in part by a grant from the Democracy Commission of the U.S. Embassy, is unafraid to ask tough questions about the often-taboo topic of prostitution. The Club has wielded its influence in the past in defeating a bill that would have legalized polygamy. The Club is a good example of civil society in

BISHKEK 00000392 002.2 OF 002

action in Kyrgyzstan and of the role of strong, opinionated women in Kyrgyz society.  
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